

FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccination in the Workplace: For Employers

What are the benefits of having a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program?

Making COVID-19 vaccination part of your workplace wellness program offers many benefits to you and your employees. To keep your workplace healthy, consider offering free, on-site COVID-19 vaccination at your business locations.

Potential benefits to employers:

- Keep the workforce healthy by preventing employees from getting COVID-19
- Reduce absences due to illness
- Reduce time missed from work to get vaccinated
- Improve productivity
- Improve morale

Potential benefits to employees:

- Prevent COVID-19 illness
- Reduce absences and doctor visits due to illness
- Offers convenience
- Improve morale

If your business can't offer COVID-19 vaccinations on site, encourage employees to seek COVID-19 vaccination in their community and provide them with information about where they can get the vaccine. A list of vaccinators within Boone County can be found [here](#).

Who is eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

All Missouri residents aged 12 and over who wish to be vaccinated are now eligible to receive the vaccine as of April 9th, 2021. Additionally, vaccine doses are provided at no out-of-pocket cost to Boone County residents. If vaccination providers charge an administration fee, it will either be reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by federal relief funding.

How does my workplace enact a COVID-19 vaccination program?

Employers considering enacting a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program should contact the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services at covidvaccine@como.gov for guidance. The planning process for hosting a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program should include input from management, human resources, employees, and labor representatives, as appropriate. Important preliminary steps include obtaining senior management support, identifying a vaccine coordinator, and enlisting expertise from local public health authorities, occupational health providers, and pharmacies.

Will use of COVID-19 vaccines be mandated under Emergency Use Authorizations (EUAs)?

No, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not mandate vaccination. However, whether a state, local government, or employer, for example, may require or mandate COVID-19 vaccination is a matter of state or other applicable law.

Can I require my employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine regardless of their medical conditions or religious beliefs?

The [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#)'s guidance on mandatory vaccination against H1N1 influenza may be applicable to COVID-19 vaccination, which became available in December 2020.

For employers covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), "...an employee may be entitled to an exemption based on an ADA disability that prevents him from taking the influenza vaccine."

For employers covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "once an employer receives notice that an employee's sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance prevents him from taking the influenza vaccine, the employer must provide a reasonable accommodation unless it would pose an undue hardship."

"Generally, ADA-covered employers should consider simply encouraging employees to get the influenza vaccine rather than requiring them to take it."

What kind of exemptions typically accompany employee vaccination programs?

Two types of exemptions can be implemented: medical and religious exemptions. Some people may be at risk for an adverse reaction because of an allergy to one of the vaccine components or a medical condition. This is referred to as a medical exemption. Some people may decline vaccination because of a religious belief. This is referred to as a religious exemption. Employers offering vaccination to workers should keep a record of the offer to vaccinate and the employee's decision to accept or decline vaccination.

Can I require people to get vaccinated as a condition of work? Can I require proof if someone claims to have been vaccinated?

Whether an employer may require or mandate COVID-19 vaccination is a matter of state or other applicable law. If an employer requires employees to provide proof that they have received a COVID-19 vaccination from a pharmacy or their own healthcare provider, the employer cannot mandate that the employee provide any medical information as part of the proof.

How can I encourage my employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Consider hosting a vaccination clinic at your workplace, and contact the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services at covidvaccine@como.gov for guidance. A list of vaccinators within Boone County can be found [here](#). We recommend offering the vaccination during

work hours. If hosting a vaccination clinic at your workplace is not possible, consider other steps to encourage vaccination, listed below:

- Be flexible in your human resources policies. Establish policies that allow employees to take paid leave to seek COVID-19 vaccination in the community. Support transportation to off-site vaccination clinics.
- Offer employees incentives to get vaccinated (paid leave, etc.).
- Use promotional posters/flyers to advertise locations offering COVID-19 vaccination in the community. Display posters about COVID-19 vaccination in break rooms, cafeterias, and other high-traffic areas. Promotional materials are also available from PHHS; please reach out to covidvaccine@como.gov for more information.
- Post articles in company communications (e.g., newsletters, intranet, emails, portals) about the importance of COVID-19 vaccination and where to get the vaccine in the community.

How can I reassure my employees that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe, even though it is new?

COVID-19 vaccines are being held to the same safety standards as all other vaccines. The federal government has been working since the pandemic began to make COVID-19 vaccines available as soon as possible while ensuring they are safe and effective through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) authority.¹ COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large studies that included thousands of adults of varying ages, racial and ethnic groups, and health status. The study results showed that the vaccines met rigorous safety criteria and provided protection from COVID-19 in the study populations.

Your employees may have some side effects, which are normal signs that the body is building protection. These side effects may affect their ability to do daily activities, but should go away in a few days. The most common side effects were pain at the injection site and symptoms like fever and chills. These side effects tended to be mild to moderate and went away quickly on their own. Many had few or no severe side effects. In addition, adults over 55 had fewer and milder side effects than younger people.

In most cases, discomfort from pain or fever is a normal sign that the body is building protection. Your employees should contact their doctor or healthcare provider:

- If the redness or tenderness at the injection site gets worse after 24 hours
- If the employee finds the side effects worrisome or they do not seem to be going away after a few days

What information should employees get before vaccination?

The law requires that vaccination providers provide vaccine recipients with certain information, including an [EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients](#) about the vaccine they are receiving and possible side effects, as well as a vaccination record card with the name and manufacturer of the vaccine they received, where they received it, and when they need to return for a second dose of vaccine if applicable. You can also hand out [this flyer](#) from CDC.

After employees have been fully vaccinated, can they stop practicing other preventive measures such as social distancing and wearing masks?

Yes. According to CDC guidance released on May 13, 2021, the risk of contracting COVID-19 is minimal for fully vaccinated people. The risk of viral transmission from fully vaccinated people to unvaccinated people is also reduced. Therefore, fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or social distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance. Additionally, employers should follow all local health ordinances and public health policies in place.

Fully vaccinated people should still get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, and should not visit private or public settings if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 10 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Prevention measures are still recommended for unvaccinated people as well as those who are not yet fully vaccinated.⁶

If we vaccinate our employees, can we return to or reopen the workplace?

It is important to conduct a thorough assessment of the workplace to identify potential workplace hazards related to COVID-19. Widespread vaccination of employees can be one consideration for restarting operations and returning to the workplace. Other considerations for returning to the workplace include:

1. The necessity for employees to physically return to the workplace and whether telework options can be continued.
2. Transmission of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the community (how many infections there are and how fast it's spreading).
3. The ability of employees to practice social distancing and other prevention measures, like wearing masks, when in the workplace.¹

How should employers assess and respond to post-vaccination signs and symptoms in employees? See table below for suggested approaches.

Signs and Symptoms Not Typical after COVID-19 Vaccination	Suggested Approach
<p>ANY signs consistent with COVID-19 (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, loss of taste or smell)</p> <p>Note: The following signs and symptoms alone are not consistent with COVID-19 and should be managed per usual protocols for vaccine-related side effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate hypersensitivity reactions (e.g., hives, anaphylaxis) • local symptoms (e.g., pain, swelling, or redness at injection site) 	<p>Exclude from work pending evaluation by a healthcare provider for potential causes, including SARS-CoV-2 infection, as appropriate. Criteria for return to work depend on the suspected or confirmed diagnosis.</p> <p>Employees with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine should isolate at home. Do not attribute positive viral COVID-19 test results to COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccination does not cause a person to test positive.</p> <p>Employees who have tested positive should follow CDC-recommended steps and not return to work until they meet criteria to end home isolation. Unvaccinated workplace contacts should be notified and advised to quarantine and self-monitor for symptoms.</p>
Signs and Symptoms Could Be from COVID-19 Vaccination, Infection with the Virus That Causes COVID-19, or Another Infection (e.g., Influenza)	Suggested Approach
<p>ANY general symptoms (e.g., fever (100°F/ 37.8°C or higher), fatigue, headache, chills, and body aches)</p>	<p>Employees who meet the following criteria may be considered for return to work without testing for COVID-19:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel well enough and are willing to work, and • Do NOT have fever, and • Do NOT have other signs and symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, or change in smell or taste. <p>If symptoms do not improve in 2 days, employees should be excluded from work and COVID-19 testing should be considered.</p> <p>Employees who experience a fever after vaccination should, ideally, stay home from work pending further evaluation, including consideration for COVID-19 testing. If an infection is not suspected or confirmed as the source of their fever, they may return to work when they feel well enough.⁴</p>

Should we tell employees to report vaccine side effects?

CDC and FDA encourage the public to report possible side effects (called “adverse events”) to the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System](#). Employers can also encourage employees to enroll in a new smartphone-based tool called “[v-safe](#)”. CDC is implementing v-safe to check in on people’s health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When employees receive a vaccine, they should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling them how to enroll in v-safe. If they enroll, they will receive regular text messages directing them to surveys where they can report any problems or adverse reactions after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. CDC also provides [recommendations](#) for people who have had allergic reactions to other vaccines and for those with other types of allergies.

When is the best time for employees to schedule their COVID-19 vaccination in conjunction with other routine vaccinations?

None of the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines are live virus vaccines. Because data are lacking on the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines administered simultaneously with other vaccines, the vaccine series should routinely be administered alone, with a minimum interval of 14 days before or after administration of any other vaccine. If employees have questions about whether a particular vaccine, such as the flu vaccine, may be given in a shorter time frame, encourage your employees to speak with their healthcare provider.

Should I include contractors and temporary employees in my COVID-19 vaccination plan?

For workers employed by contract firms or temporary help agencies, the staffing agency and the host employer are joint employers and, therefore, both are responsible for providing and maintaining a safe work environment. The extent of the responsibilities the staffing agency and the host employer have will vary, depending on the workplace conditions, and should be described in their contract.

If you plan to offer vaccination at your workplace, consider providing vaccination to all people working at the workplace, regardless of their status as a contract or temporary employee. What is most important is to encourage everyone at the work site to be vaccinated, no matter what their work arrangement is. If you do not plan to or are unable to offer work site vaccination, consider providing information to those at the workplace about how to explore options for vaccination in the community.

Should I stagger vaccination schedules for employees to avoid worker shortages due to vaccine side effects?

Most side effects are mild and occur within the first 3 days of vaccination. Symptoms typically resolve within 1–2 days, and are more common following the second dose. We expect that most employees who experience symptoms following vaccination will not need to miss work.

However, some employees who get vaccinated may have side effects, like fever, and might need to miss work temporarily.¹ Workplaces may consider staggering vaccination appointments so that they are not vaccinating all workers at the same time in a single department, service, or unit where continued operations are required. Staggering vaccination might be more important following receipt of the second dose of an mRNA vaccine (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna), when symptoms after vaccination, like fever, are more likely to occur. Facilities that choose to stagger vaccine administration should also ensure all employees receive 2 doses as recommended.⁴

What if an employee has already had COVID-19? Should they still get vaccinated?

Yes, unless the employee is currently in isolation or quarantine due to testing positive or having been exposed to COVID-19. That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19.

Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine

1. COVID-19 vaccination will help keep you from getting COVID-19

Based on what we know about vaccines for other diseases and early data from clinical trials, experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine helps keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. Getting vaccinated yourself also helps protect people around you, particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.²

2. Once you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing more

After you are fully vaccinated for COVID-19, you can start doing some things that you stopped doing because of the pandemic. Indoor and outdoor activities pose minimal risk to fully vaccinated people. Additionally, the risk of contracting COVID-19 is minimal for fully vaccinated people. The risk of viral transmission from fully vaccinated people to unvaccinated people is also reduced. Therefore, fully vaccinated people can:

- Resume activities without wearing masks or social distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.
- Refrain from testing following a known exposure, if asymptomatic (with some exceptions for specific settings).
- Refrain from quarantine following a known exposure if asymptomatic.
- Resume domestic travel and refrain from testing before or after travel or self-quarantine after travel.
- Refrain from testing before leaving the United States for international travel (unless required by the destination) and refrain from self-quarantine after arriving back in the United States.⁶

3. Free Vaccination

We are committed to providing a free COVID-19 vaccination experience to all Missourians, including those without insurance. No person can be billed for the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination providers may charge an administration fee to insurance, Medicaid or Medicare, if applicable in your situation. Uninsured Missourians will be able to receive the vaccine regardless of their health insurance status.³

4. COVID-19 vaccination is a safer way to help build protection

COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. And if you get sick, you could spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you. Getting COVID-19 may offer some protection, known as natural immunity. However, the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. COVID-19 vaccines help protect people who are vaccinated from getting sick or severely ill with COVID-19 and also help protect people around them.

5. COVID-19 vaccination will be an important tool to help stop the pandemic

CDC recommends getting vaccinated as soon as a vaccine is available to you. Wearing masks and staying 6 feet apart from others help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. A growing body of evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to be infected without showing symptoms (called an asymptomatic infection) or spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to others.² Additionally, new forms, or variants, of the virus that causes COVID-19 have emerged. Current data suggest that COVID-19 vaccines used in the United States should work against these variants. For this reason, COVID-19 vaccines are an essential tool to protect people against COVID-19, including against new variants.⁵

6. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective

Clinical trials for all vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use, including COVID-19 vaccines. The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine before it is used under what is known as an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).² Currently authorized vaccines in the United States are highly effective at protecting vaccinated people against symptomatic and severe COVID-19.⁶

7. None of the COVID-19 vaccines can make you sick with COVID-19

None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19, so a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.²

Sources:

- 1) FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccination in the Workplace: For Employers
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/vaccines/toolkits/FAQs-for-Employers_EW-Toolkit_508.pdf (accessed Apr 12, 2021).
- 2) Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html> (accessed Apr 12, 2021).
- 3) COVID-19 Vaccine Information <https://covidvaccine.mo.gov/> (accessed Apr 16, 2021).
- 4) Post-vaccination Considerations for Workplaces
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/workplaces-businesses/vaccination-considerations-for-workplaces.html> (accessed Apr 26, 2021).
- 5) COVID-19 Vaccines Work.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html> (accessed Apr 26, 2021).
- 6) Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html> (accessed May 13, 2021).